

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4273

INFO USINFO WASHDC IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 3 DAMASCUS 4992

NSC FOR DR. BRZEZINSKI AND
WHITE HOUSE FOR MR. POWELL

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)

SUBJ: PRESIDENT ASSAD'S PRESS CONFERENCE, AUGUST 4

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF PRESIDENT ASSAD'S AUGUST 4 PRESS
CONFERENCE:

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE IDEA OF
THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF THE SO-CALLED CONFRONTATION STATES
AND ISRAEL MEETING IN NEW YORK OR WASHINGTON IN SEPTEMBER
PERHAPS TO PREPARE FOR A GENEVA PEACE CONFERENCE? DO
YOU THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA?

ASSAD: IT'S BETTER IF WE CONCENTRATE AT THIS STAGE ON
THE GENEVA CONFERENCE TO PREPARE FOR IT WELL, AND THEN
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WE'LL RECONVENE THE CONFERENCE AT THE PROPER TIME IF THE
PREPARATIONS ACHIEVE THEIR GOAL.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, WOULD SUCH A WORKING GROUP OF
FOREIGN MINISTERS NOT BE A FORM OF PREPARATION FOR A GENEVA
CONFERENCE?

ASSAD: THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS WORKING GROUP WOULD BE LOOKED UPON AS A COMPETITOR TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. AND I DO NOT THINK THAT ANY OF US WOULD LIKE TO LOOK AT IT IN THIS WAY. BESIDES, IF THE MEETING OF THIS WORKING GROUP FAILS THEN THE RESULT OF THIS FAILURE WILL BE THE SAME AS THE FAILURE OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. THEREFORE, IT WOULD BE BETTER TO GO TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AFTER GOOD PREPARATION (UNCLEAR).

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, IF THE PREPARATIONS WERE ADEQUATE, WOULD SYRIA CONSIDER ATTENDING A GENEVA CONFERENCE WITHOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PLO?

ASSAD: WHY SHOULD YOU PRESUME THAT ADEQUATE PREPARATION WOULD EXCLUDE THE PLO?

QUESTION: IF YOU HAD THE SENSE THAT PROGRESS COULD BE MADE ON THE MAIN ISSUES -- TERRITORIAL WITHDRAWAL, RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, WITHOUT THE PLO BEING PRESENT AT THE BEGINNING OF A CONFERENCE -- WOULD YOU ATTEND SUCH A CONFERENCE?

ANSWER: AT THIS STATE WE DISCUSSED THE SUBSTANCE RATHER THAN THE FORM, THE PROCEDURES, BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT WHAT IS INTENDED BY CERTAIN OBJECTIONS, WHICH TAKE THE FORM OF OBJECTIONS TO THE FORM, TO THE PROCEDURES, ARE INDEED THE SUBSTANCE ITSELF AND NOT THE FORM. WE BELIEVE THAT THE UNCLASSIFIED

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OBJECTIONS TO THE PRESENCE OF THE PALESTINIANS AT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE IS MEANT TO BE A DENIAL OF THEIR RIGHTS RATHER THAN AN OBJECTION TO THE PRESENCE OF CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS. THEREFORE IT IS IMPORTANT TO CLARIFY THE RIGHTS, THE ESSENTIAL RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE. AND I BELIEVE THAT WHEN ISRAEL HAS THE DESIRE TO RECOGNIZE THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE, THEN IT WILL NOT MAKE A PROBLEM OF THE PRESENCE OF THE PLO.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THEN THAT YOU REJECT COMPLETELY THE NOTION OF WORKING GROUP SESSION? AND IF THAT IS CORRECT, THEN DID YOU HAVE SOME PROPOSALS TO OFFER MR. VANCE TO KEEP THE PROCESS MOVING?

ASSAD: IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF REJECTION OR ACCEPTANCE OF THE WORKING GROUP. ONLY, THAT IN THE FIRST INSTANCE WE COULD NOT SEE THE BENEFIT OF THE FORMATION OF THIS WORKING GROUP. THE PRESENT ALTERNATIVE IS THESE CONTACTS, THESE CONTACTS WHICH ARE TAKING PLACE AMONG THE PARTIES CONCERNED. I WOULD ADD THAT OUR BROTHERS IN EGYPT WHO PROPOSED THE FORMATION OF THIS WORKING GROUP, PERHAPS THEY SAW CERTAIN BENEFITS IN THIS WHICH SO FAR WE HAVE NOT SEEN.

QUESTION: IF I COULD JUST FOLLOW THAT UP, MR. PRESIDENT, THEN OTHER THAN THE CONTINUED CONTACTS THAT YOU SEE AS DESIRABLE WOULD YOU HAVE ANY SPECIFIC PROPOSALS TO MAKE TO MR. VANCE TODAY?

ASSAD: TODAY WE HAD A ROUND OF DISCUSSIONS ON THE PROBLEM AS A WHOLE. MR. VANCE HAD CERTAIN IDEAS, AND HE IS TRYING AND SEEKING TO CRYSTALIZE THESE IDEAS, THROUGH DISCUSSIONS WITH THE VARIOUS PARTIES. WE, TOO, HAVE OUR OWN CLEAR IDEAS WHICH ARE FIRM IDEAS, THAT HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED BEFORE. MANY TIMES. THEY ARE NOT NEW. THE DISCUSSIONS TOOK PLACE ABOUT ALL OF THEM.

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QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, DID THESE CONVERSATIONS TODAY BETWEEN YOU AND SECRETARY VANCE, HAVE THEY MADE ANY DIFFERENCE AT ALL, IN YOUR VIEW, IN REACHING GENEVA? HAVE THEY REPRESENTED ANY CHANGE? HAVE THEY MADE ANY DIFFERENCE IN THE PURSUIT OF REACHING GENEVA?

ASSAD: OUR MEETING TODAY WAS THE CONTINUATION OF OUR PAST MEETINGS. AND THE CONVERSATIONS TODAY WERE THE CONTINUATION OF PAST CONVERSATIONS. THE AIMS, THE OBJECTIVES ARE THE SAME; NAMELY, TO ACHIEVE A JUST PEACE IN THIS AREA, TO SEEK WAYS AND MEANS THAT WILL LEAD TO THIS OBJECTIVE.

QUESTION: MR. VANCE TOLD US EARLIER THAT THERE WERE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YOU AND HIM ON THE AMERICAN PROPOSALS WHICH HE BROUGHT HERE TODAY. COULD YOU TELL US WHAT THESE DIFFERENCES ARE? DO THEY, FOR EXAMPLE, CENTER ON HIS IDEAS ON THE NATURE OF PEACE, AND FOR THE PACE AND THE EXTENT OF ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORY?

ASSAD: IT APPEARS TO ME THAT IF HE HAS REALLY TOLD YOU ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE YOU MUST HAVE ASKED HIM THIS QUESTION.

QUESTION: WE DID. BUT HE SUGGESTED THAT WE SHOULD ASK MR. ASSAD TONIGHT.

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NSC FOR DR. BRZEZINSKI AND
WHITE HOUSE FOR MR. POWELL

ASSAD: IT IS QUITE NORMAL TO PUT FORWARD SUCH PROPOSALS
AND SEE THAT THERE IS SOME DISAGREEMENT ON SUCH PROPOSALS.
BUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT PEACE SHOULD REMAIN OUR
OBJECTIVE, AND THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO SEEK THIS
OBJECTIVE, AND TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS THAT STAND AS AN OBSTACLE
IN OUR WAY. ON THIS THERE IS AGREEMENT BETWEEN US AND
MR. VANCE.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, TO REPHRASE A QUESTION THAT
WAS PUT BEFORE, ARE WE CLOSER TO GENEVA TODAY THAN WE WERE
TWO DAYS AGO?

ASSAD: NOT NECESSARILY.

QUESTION: COULD YOU EXPLAIN WHAT YOU HAD IN MIND, GIVING
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US THAT ANSWER?

ASSAD: WHAT I MEANT TO SAY IS THAT THERE IS NO NEW DATA
THAT MAKES US CLOSER TO GENEVA THAN WE WERE TWO DAYS AGO.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, TO FOLLOW THAT UP, WHAT DO YOU
BELIEVE CHANCES ARE NOW FOR A PRODUCTIVE GENEVA CONFERENCE
THIS YEAR? DO YOU THINK THE CHANCES ARE RATHER SMALL,
ARE THEY AS GOOD AS FIFTY PERCENT, OR ARE THEY QUITE GOOD?

ASSAD: I WOULD PREFER TO SAY THAT THEY ARE NOT GOOD, AND AT THE SAME TIME NOT BAD. IN OTHER WORDS WE SHOULD NOT BE OVER OPTIMISTIC AND NOT OVER PESSIMISTIC. IN BRIEF, I WOULD SAY THAT THERE ARE DIFFICULTIES WHICH HAVE TO BE OVERCOME. THESE DIFFICULTIES ARE NOT INSURMONTABLE, PROVIDED THAT THERE IS A DESIRE FOR PEACE.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, SINCE ISRAEL HAS INDICATED NO DESIRE, REALLY, THAT IT IS PREPARED TO GIVE UP THE WEST BANK OF THE JORDAN RIVER, WHY ARE YOU NOT PESSIMISTIC?

ANSWER: BECAUSE THINGS DO NOT DEPEND MERELY ON THE WILL OF ISRAEL. HAD THEY BEEN SO, HAD WE CONSIDERED THAT THE MOVEMENT TOWARD PEACE DEPENDS ONLY ON THE WILL OF ISRAEL, WE SHOULD HAVE STOPPED ALL EFFORTS, ALL POLITICAL EFFORTS, TOO.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, WILL YOU BE SENDING FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION NEXT MONTH SO THAT HE CAN CONSULT WITH SECRETARY VANCE?

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ASSAD: THERE IS NO PROBLEM ABOUT SENDING FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM TO THE UNITED NATIONS. IN OTHER WORDS, A MEETING BETWEEN OUR FOREIGN MINISTER, MR. KHADDAM AND SECRETARY VANCE CAN TAKE PLACE ANY TIME AND ANY PLACE.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, THE ARAB STATES INSIST THAT THE PLO MUST BE INVITED TO A GENEVA CONFERENCE. THE ISRAELIS INSIST THAT THEY WILL HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH THE PLO, AND THEY HAVE A VETO POWER OVER THE PARTICIPANTS AT GENEVA. HOW DO YOU SEE A WAY OF RECONCILING THESE TWO POSITIONS?

ASSAD: THE ARAB STATES INSIST ON INSURING THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE. BUT THE QUESTION IS WHETHER ISRAEL RECOGNIZES THESE RIGHTS OR NOT. INDEED, HAD ISRAEL BEEN WILLING TO RECOGNIZE THE RIGHTS OF THE ARAB PEOPLE IN PALESTINE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTIONS AND RESPOND TO THE DESIRE OF THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE WITHOUT HAVING DISCUSSIONS WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE, I ASSUME THAT THE PLO WILL NOT FIND ANYTHING DISTURBING TO IT IN THIS. BUT THE PROBLEM IS THAT ISRAEL WANTS TO DENY THESE RIGHTS. AND AS I SAID A WHILE AGO, THE QUESTION IS ONE OF SUBSTANCE AND NOT OF PROCEDURE OR FORM.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, IS THERE ANYTHING THAT ISRAEL COULD DO IN ADVANCE WHICH IN YOUR PHRASE WOULD RECOGNIZE THE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, WHICH WOULD NOT REQUIRE THE PRESENCE OF THE PLO AT A GENEVA MEETING OR ANY KIND OF PREPARATORY OR SUBSTANTIVE MEETING?

ASSAD: TO IMPLEMENT THE UN RESOLUTIONS CONCERNING THE ARAB PEOPLE OF PALESTINE. AND IF YOU WANT TO ADD ANOTHER QUESTION AS TO WHICH RESOLUTIONS, I WOULD SAY ALL THE RESOLUTIONS WHICH BECAUSE ALL THE THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE UN CONCERNING THE PALESTINE QUESTION REAFFIRM AND EMPHASIZE UNCLASSIFIED

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THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, IN THE SAME LINE, THOUGH, I WAS WONDERING IF YOU FEEL THAT THERE HAS TO BE A CONCURRENT RECOGNITION BY THE PLO OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST, AS A NECESSARY STEP TOWARD PEACE?

ASSAD: HAS ISRAEL SAID IT WOULD RECOGNIZE?

QUESTION: OR HAS THE PLO? I WAS WONDERING ABOUT HIS OPINION, THOUGH, AS TO WHETHER THE PLO SHOULD.

ASSAD: YOUR QUESTION WAS NOT CLEAR. YOU SEE, IF THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE ARE RECOGNIZED THEN WHAT APPLIES TO THE OTHER ARAB STATES WOULD APPLY TO THE PALESTINIANS.

QUESTION: IN OTHER WORDS, ONE HAS TO GO BEFORE THE OTHER, OR COULD THEY BE DONE AT THE SAME TIME?

ASSAD: INDEED IF THERE IS TO BE A RECOGNITION, SUCH A RECOGNITION SHOULD COME FIRST FROM ISRAEL. BECAUSE ISRAEL HAS THE STATUS OF A STATE AND HAS MORE ABILITY OF MOVEMENT, MORE MARGIN OF MOVEMENT. WHEREAS, THE PLO REPRESENTS A PERSECUTED AND DISPLACED PEOPLE. AND THEREFORE ITS CAPABILITY TO MOVE IS LESS. ANYWAY, THE RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL BY THE PLO IS A QUESTION WHICH CONCERNS THE PLO ITSELF. BUT IN MY VIEW THE RECOGNITION BY THE PLO OF ISRAEL WILL MEAN GIVING UP BY THE PLO THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE. IN ANY CASE, THE ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN SAYING THAT THEY DO NOT NEED RECOGNITION BY THE PLO, AND THAT EVEN IF THE PLO RECOGNIZES THEM THEY HAVE NOTHING TO DISCUSS WITH THE PLO. WHY SHOULD WE DISCUSS A MATTER THAT IS NOT REQUIRED EVEN BY THE ISRAELIS?

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NSC FOR DR. BRZEZINSKI AND
WHITE HOUSE FOR MR. POWELL

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, I WONDER IF YOU COULD EXPLAIN
AN APPARENT CONTRADICTION BETWEEN TWO OF YOUR STATEMENTS.
IN FEBRUARY, YOU TOLD US HERE IN THIS ROOM THAT SYRIA WOULD
DEMAND RETURN OF EVERY INCH OF OCCUPIED TERRITORY.
YET IN A NEWSWEEK INTERVIEW LAST WEEK YOU DESCRIBED THE GOLAN
AS A PERIPHERAL MATTER. THERE APPEARS TO BE A CONTRADICTION
THERE. CAN YOU EXPLAIN IT?

ASSAD: AND WHAT IS THE CONTRADICTION?

QUESTION: WELL, IF THE GOLAN IS A PERIPHERAL MATTER IT DOES
NOT SEEM AS THOUGH SYRIA IS GOING TO INSIST ON THE RETURN
ON EVERY INCH OF OCCUPIED TERRITORY.

ASSAD: IT IS DIFFICULT TO REACH SUCH A CONCLUSION.
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BECAUSE WHEN I SAID THAT THE MOTHER PROBLEM WAS THE PALESTINE QUESTION, AND THAT THE GOLAN AND THE SINAI PROBLEMS WERE SUBSEQUENT TO THE MOTHER PROBLEM, I MEANT TO SAY THAT THESE FOLLOWED THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF PALESTINE. IT DOES NOT REQUIRE MUCH EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE ARABS AND ISRAEL STARTED SHARPLY SINCE 1948, AND SINCE 1948 THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE HAVE BEEN DISPLACED. SINCE THAT DATE THE UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTIONS HAVE BEEN ADOPTED YEAR AFTER YEAR REAFFIRMING THESE RIGHTS. WHEREAS THE QUESTION OF THE GOLAN, OF SINAI AND PARTS OF PALESTINE, THESE QUESTIONS WERE CREATED IN 1967 AS A RESULT OF THE WAR OF 1967. AND THAT WAR OF 1967 WAS BECAUSE OF THE MOTHER QUESTION OF PALESTINE. THAT IS WHAT I MEANT TO SAY, AND WHAT WAS CLEAR. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE IDEA OF GIVING UP ANY PART OF THE GOLAN HEIGHTS HAS NEVER COME TO OUR MIND, AND WILL ABSOLUTELY NOT COME TO OUR MIND.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, IF THE MOTHER QUESTION GOES BACK TO 1948, DON'T YOU THINK ISRAEL SHOULD JUST GIVE UP EVERYTHING? WHY JUST THE 1967 BORDERS. WHY NOT, YOU KNOW, GO BACK EVEN FURTHER?

ASSAD: WHAT IS REQUIRED OF ISRAEL IS TO IMPLEMENT THE UN RESOLUTIONS, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WHICH ARE THOSE WHICH HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY THE U.S.A. WE ARE ONLY ASKING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THOSE RESOLUTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY THE U.S.A. WHEN WE ASK FOR THIS, ARE WE AGGRESSORS?

QUESTION: THAT WASN'T THE QUESTION. BUT IF ISRAEL IMPLEMENTS THESE RESOLUTIONS DOES THAT MEAN THAT SYRIA IS PREPARED TO DROP ANY FURTHER TERRITORIAL DEMANDS ON BEHALF OF THE PALESTINIANS AND ON BEHALF OF SYRIA.

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ASSAD: YES, WE ARE ONLY DEMANDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTIONS. WITH NOTHING ELSE.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, THIS IS SECRETARY VANCE'S SECOND VISIT TO THIS COUNTRY, AND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN CONDUCTING A SIX MONTH CAMPAIGN TO MAKE PROGRESS TOWARD A GENEVA CONFERENCE. IT SEEMS FROM WHAT YOU JUST SAID THAT VERY LITTLE IF ANY PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE. IS THERE A POINT AT WHICH THIS PROGRESS WILL BREAK DOWN, OR MORE TO THE POINT IS THERE ANY POINT IN CONTINUING?

ASSAD: WE HOPE IT WILL NOT REACH THE BREAKING POINT.
AND AS I SAID PREVIOUSLY WE HAVE GOOD IMPRESSIONS ABOUT
THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. AND FOR ITS EFFORTS IT DESERVES
THANKS. HOWEVER, THIS QUESTION REQUIRES CONTINUATION OF
EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE PEACE ON THE BASIS OF JUSTICE.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU THIS, SIR.
ON THE BASIS OF THE WAY I UNDERSTAND YOU TONIGHT, YOU ARE
REJECTING THE WORKING GROUP CONCEPT BUT AT THE SAME TIME
YOU WANT TO SEE A CONTINUATION OF THE SUBSTANCE OF THE
WORKING GROUP IN EFFECT; THAT IS TO SAY YOU WANT TO SEE
CONTINUED CONTACTS TAKING PLACE BETWEEN THE PARTIES. SO WHAT
IS LEFT IS SIMPLY YOUR REJECTION OF AN IDEA OF PRESIDENT
SADAT'S AND AT THE SAME TIME YOU WANT TO PROCESS OF CONTACTS
TO CONTINUE. IS THAT CORRECT?

ASSAD: THE PRESIDENT WANTS TO ADD TO HIS LAST ANSWER THE
FOLLOWING: HE WANTS TO CONFIRM HIS SATISFACTION WITH THE
MEETINGS THAT HE HELD WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN GENEVA.
IT MUST BE CLEAR THAT SYRIA AND EGYPT ARE IN FULL AGREEMENT
ON ALL THE SUBSTANCE, THE ESSENTIAL ISSUES. ALTHOUGH
THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE HAVE DISCUSSED EVERY STEP
AS WE MOVE TOWARD THE OBJECTIVE OF PEACE. HOWEVER, I
WOULD RATHER NOT DISCUSS THIS PROPOSAL. HAVING NOT
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DISCUSSED THIS PROPOSAL ADEQUATELY DOES NOT MEAN
ANY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SYRIA AND EGYPT. BECAUSE TRUST
BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES CONTINUES AND AGREEMENT BETWEEN
THE TWO FRATERNAL (?) COUNTRIES CONTINUES.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, I AM SORRY BUT I REMAIN PUZZLED.
YOU ARE SIMPLY REJECTING THE PROCEDURE AND CONTINUING
THE SUBSTANCE OF CONTACTS. IS IT BECAUSE OF CONCERN
THAT A WORKING GROUP WOULD CUT OUT THE PLO?

ASSAD: THE WORKING GROUP IS A QUESTION OF A MEETING BETWEEN
THE ARABS AND THE ISRAELIS AND THIS IS WHAT WILL HAPPEN
AT GENEVA. WHY SHOULD WE REPLACE THE GENEVA CONFERENCE
WITH THIS WORKING GROUP?

THANK YOU MR. PRESIDENT. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
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MURPHY

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